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Sino-US Relations: Significance of 135th Sino-US Meeting 4-16-88

REF: Warsaw 143

1. Considering results of January 20 Ambassadorial meeting with PRC, I have been struck with degree of congruence between our approach to meeting and that of PRC. Both sides were clearly testing the air and avoiding past polemic issues. While Chinese, for example, continued references to US "occupation" of Taiwan, they did not, as in past and even as recently as in their November 25, 1968 statement, demand immediate and unconditional withdrawal, nor did they assert that Chinese will decide for themselves whether to use peaceful or forceful means to "liberate" Taiwan. For first time in years they talked of "fundamentally improving" Sino-US relations, and emphasized peaceful negotiations as instrument for

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accomplishing this. Chinese proposal for meeting at channels higher level or through other ~~channels~~ and our suggestion for sending representative either to Peking or Washington bring us surprisingly close to agreement on this subject although it was clear at meeting that neither of us was ~~sure~~ at all sure where we go next and exactly how we get there.

2. Chinese obviously have Soviet Union in mind in any move to improve Sino-US relations. Nevertheless, their decision to eschew all other contentious issues such as air and sea intrusions, Viet-Nam, and alleged US-Soviet collusion against China and focus only on key Taiwan issue, and their security precautions at the meeting suggest that they may genuinely be interested in making some progress. In any case, I believe we have moved to a situation more closely resembling the mid-1950s than at any other time in the past twelve years.

3. While I do not wish to over-dramatize positive aspects

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of meeting and fully realize that Taiwan is single most difficult question, it appears that Chinese may be signalling us that they are ready to move, but are finding it difficult to take first step.

4. Peking obviously want us to disengage completely from support of the GRC. Conceivably it may now be interested in indication that we are willing to disengage at least partially in terms of our clear sign to them we are not opposed to a peaceful PRC-GRC resolution. I am sure there are limitations on how much further we can go. I suspect the Chinese may be aware of this, however, and may be prepared to accept some half-way house providing they have some symbolic "change" in US policy to show.

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